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SUBJECT: SULAIMANIYAH OFFICIALS ON COMBATTING PKK

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3773
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 3769

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Ellen Germain for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

This is an Erbil Regional Reconstruction Team message.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: RRToff pressed officials to continue specific actions against the PKK, such as using enhanced checkpoints effectively to stop PKK logistical and fighter movements and stepping up airport security, in meetings held November 12 in Sulaimaniyah, a PUK-dominated province in the KRG that does not border Turkey but includes the Qandil Mountains PKK stronghold. Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) politburo members told us they are hopeful a peaceful political solution to the PKK crisis with Turkey can be found and downplayed concern over any pending Turkish cross-border operation, also noting the closure of PKK-affiliated offices and efforts to restrict PKK movements in Sulaimaniyah. A PUK Peshmerga deputy commander said his forces had tightened security around PKK-controlled areas and had not mobilized in response to Turkish threats. He also gave credit to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) for making the crisis an Iraqi problem and not just a Kurdish one. The Chairman of the Sulaimaniyah International Airport (SIA) assured us that airport security was increased to prevent the movement of PKK terrorists and provided an overview of SIA's security measures. End Summary.

PUK Politburo Members Hopeful on Turkey/PKK

[1](#)2. (C) PUK Politburo members and the deputy commander of PUK Peshmerga Forces expressed hope for a peaceful political solution to the crisis with Turkey and downplayed concern over any impending incursion into Iraq by Turkish military forces in search of PKK positions and supply lines. Mala Bakhtyar, senior member of the PUK Politburo, said he hoped that the recent Kurdish political party's delegation to Ankara engaged in fruitful party-to-party meetings and would try to meet with members of the Turkish government and parliament.

[1](#)3. (C) Bakhtyar noted as a positive sign that Turkish Republican People's Party leader Deniz Baykal had called on the KRG to raise the delegation to a government-to-government level. Bakhtyar said he appreciated the helpful US role in calming the rhetoric and noted that US involvement would be critical in helping resolve the situation. He pointed to the November 3 closing of the Sulaimaniyah offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party, a group known to be sympathetic to the PKK, and underscored the PUK/KDP resolve to ensure PKK movements in the KRG-controlled region would be limited.

PUK Peshmerga Deputy Commander

Highlights Tightened Security

14. (C) General Mustafa Said Qadir, Deputy Commander of PUK Peshmerga Forces gave credit to the KRG for casting the issue as an Iraqi, vice Kurdish, problem and indicated that Peshmerga forces in Sulaimaniyah province had not mobilized in response to Turkish threats. Qadir noted that his forces had tightened security around PKK-controlled areas and were no longer allowing the media to travel to these areas. He also confirmed the closure of the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party office in Sulaimaniyah and noted that the party headquarters had been licensed by the Iraqi Government.

15. (C) Citing the long supply lines required for any broad incursion and the potential for Turkish casualties, Qadir said, "Turkey doesn't have the heart to invade." He surmised that any Turkish actions would be limited to shelling and aerial bombing of PKK positions. He said that if Turkey targeted only PKK positions, the Peshmerga would likely not respond. If Turkish forces began to attack or occupy town and villages, however, Peshmerga and Iraqi forces would be obliged to react. Qadir returned to the well-worn hypothesis that Turkey is losing control of its domestic political situation and is increasingly fearful of Islam's rise; the Turkish military was creating a scapegoat crisis to keep the public's attention on the external threat and using the crisis to increase its budget allocations.

Security Increased at Sulaimaniyah Airport

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16. (C) Sulaimaniyah International Airport (SIA) Chairman Kamaran Ahmed told RRT Erbil IPAO that KRG security officials gave specific instructions to SIA officials to take increased security precautions to prevent the movement of PKK members. RRToff stressed the need for SIA to do the maximum to prevent the movement of PKK fighters. Ahmed indicated that robust and visible security measures at SIA have precluded most security problems, noting that all of SIA's security procedures conform to International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Annex 17.

17. (C) The airport is about the size of a small U.S. regional airport with one arrival and one departure gate. Ahmed said that SIA is "70-80 percent" compliant with ICAO security standards. Arriving and departing domestic and international passengers' identification is checked using machine-reading devices that are linked to local and other databases, and immigration officials are equipped with digital cameras at their booths. Access to the airport complex is controlled by MOI security, Peshmerga and local police, while passengers are allowed into the terminal after passing three roadside checkpoints that include bomb-sniffing dogs. No private vehicles are currently allowed into the parking lot in front of the terminal building. SIA employs modern x-ray and metal detection equipment to scan passengers, baggage and cargo; and access to the apron and the flight line is restricted.

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